

February 21, 2011

Chairman Jones and Committee Members:

We are 78-year-old grandparents. We would like to make a few comments regarding the Adam Walsh Act compliance legislation (SB 188 and SB 189), and why we feel that non-violent/low-risk sex offenders which are not a threat to society, like our granddaughter and all the young adults with similar circumstances, should have the ability to petition for removal from the Sex Offender Registry, with the petitioning criteria not so restrictive. You know the statistics...that more than 90% of new offenses are committed by new offenders, but we're still punishing all 100%. Also, re-offending occurs within three years. We feel that a risk assessment should be the main determining factor based on individual cases. We just wish you would have a one-on-one conversation with our granddaughter, or any of the young people. You would find that they are certainly not a threat to society, but an asset.

Our granddaughter was very heavily involved with drugs as a teenager, and at the age of 19 she had consensual sex with a 14-year-old boy. She was not lurking behind a bush to commit a predatory act, nor was she in a position of authority, but made a VERY BAD CHOICE, for which she deeply regrets, as is the case with many other young adults on the SOR.

Our granddaughter served 2-1/2 years in prison (released November, 2005), and has successfully completed two years of parole, substance abuse counseling, and individual/group sex offender therapy for BAD CHOICES. I am pleased to say that she has been clean from drugs for over 7 years. She started college in January 2006. She testified, along with several other young adults in front of a Sub-Committee of the House Judiciary in March, 2006 with the hope that the structural flaws of the Registry would be repaired. She has earned her CAC-M (Certified Addiction Counselor-Michigan). She was very fortunate to gain employment with a community service organization that is very forgiving of the individual who has made bad choices; offering opportunity for a second chance. She was there for over a year as a case manager and working with clients enrolled in the MPRI (Michigan Prisoner Re-entry Initiative), and writing the "Policy and Procedure Manual" for that program. She has now been employed by another community service organization as a full-time addictions counselor since June, 2008. She received her Bachelor of Science in Addiction Studies (summa cum laude) December, 2008. She was accepted into the U of D Mercy Master's of Counseling Program that began in January, 2009, attending classes two nights a week. She started her fourth semester in January 2010, and will receive her Master of Arts in Community Counseling, summer 2011. She will then proceed to earn a Ph.D in Counselor Supervision and Education.

We've made bad choices in our lives...maybe you have too. Some were a growing-up experience, but we've had second chances to make-up for them. If only these young people could be granted that same opportunity.

When did we as a society stop adhering to the idea that if you do the crime, you do the time...and when you're released, your debt to society is fulfilled. If you're a sex offender, your debt to society never ends...at least for 25 years on the Registry. They are trying desperately to be the normal, productive citizens they are expected to be but are hampered at every turn...they are not allowed to forget the past and move on because they are reminded of it every three months when they must report to law enforcement and register. They can't live here, nor there...and, when they do find housing, they are denied with the landlord responding, "Sorry, we do not want sex offenders". And now, this legislation would make their lives an "open book" on the "public internet", actually, putting their lives in harms way. Why not keep non-violent, low-risk offenders non-public.

Are they not ostracized from society enough at the present time. How long do we punish them after they leave prison? Should they not be rewarded for the changed life they are now living, and not continue to be punished, based on the offense that they have already paid for.

By all means keep watch on the worst and the most predatory, the ones that are a danger to society, but let's not become an intolerant, hostile nation to those who aren't, continuing to seek revenge. Our hearts break for these young adults.

Week after week John Walsh on "America's Most Wanted" refers to ALL on the Registry as "scum-bags". While all people can feel for his personal loss, these young adults should in no way be deemed PREDATORS, OR SCUM-BAGS.

We would like for you to consider the fact that these young people will be in their mid-forties, the age of their parents and possibly some of you, before they can be removed from the Registry. Also, please ponder for a moment the fact that in order for us to celebrate with our granddaughter the day she is removed, May 23, 2028,...we will have to live to be 96-years-old.

We are asking that this Committee create an avenue for petitioning that is not so restrictive, with exclusions removed, allowing Judges to make a determination on an individual case basis. Please consider how these lives are being lived and show mercy; so that true justice, which is so badly needed, may be rendered.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns with this life-altering situation.

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